STAT
Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/03/08 : CIA-RDP90-01208R000100190040-9
NEW YORK TIMES
16 JUL 1973

Peace With Hono

AT HOME ABROAD

By Anthony Lewis

LONDON, July 15—"Torture during interrogation, or as a disciplinary measure within prisons, is no longer even motivated by a desire to gather 'intelligence' . . . torture is widely used not only as an instrument of intimidation but as an end in itself . . . in many instances torture has become no more or less than a matter of habit."

Those are some phrases—some of the milder ones—from a report recently issued by Amnesty International, the highly respected independent organization concerned with political prisoners around the world. The subject was the situation of the 100,000 or more civilians detained by the Saigon Government.

The report described in revolting detail what is done to human beings in the prisons and interrogation centers of South Vietnam: the use of electricity, beating, water; the crippling and death that result. It named victims and described cases in convincing detail. It called the situation, altogether, "one of the most serious cases of political repression in the world today."

The Amnesty report rated a few paragraphs in some serious British and American newspapers. Most of the mass media paid no attention at all. It was just some more of the familiar horror of Vietnam.

It is not surprising that people turn off the moral pain of Vietnam. There are limits to outrage, to tears. Tales of misery, however true, eventually weary the audience. People instinctively protect themselves from being incapacitated by despair.

But individual escape cannot end public responsibility. Mass injustice anywhere claims the concern of mankind, for it diminishes and threatens all of us. Nor can the cases of mistreatment of American war prisoners in North Vietnam excuse massive and continuing official terror in the South.

Can the stories be true? That is what some people in the West would ask, finding it difficult to face the horrors reported. But there is no escape that way. For the situation of political prisoners in South Vietnam has been seen and graphically described by a wide variety of observers: American Congressmen, correspondents, doctors and many others.

The leading British commercial television company, Granada, did a careful program on Saigon's political prisons. Among others, it interviewed two American physiotherapists, Jane and David Barton, in a hospital at Quang Ngai.

"People come to the prisoner ward of the hospital often immediately after they've been tortured," Jane Barton said, because prison officials "prefer not to have a dead body at the interrogation center. . . . The torture that we see the results of most frequently is [attaching] electrical wires to people's toes, or fingers, or sensitive parts of their bodies."

The Bartons had films and still photographs of some of the victims. Two were women who had been beaten on the head until their skulls fractured and they became paralyzed on one side of their bodies. One was a young girl, the other a 67-year-old woman.

Granada also showed 60-year-old Mrs. Ba Shau, who was blinded by lime thrown in her face by guards when she was held in the tiger cages on Con Son Island. Granada showed other freed prisoners from Con Son being treated by a former American Air Force doctor, John Champlain. Dr. Champlain described how various prisoners lost the use of their legs by being confined in the cages or shackled to their beds.

The Saigon Government of Nguyen Van Thieu is marvelously cynical in its discussion of these matters: It says that there are no "political prisoners" at all: Everyone in its jails is either a common criminal or a "Communist."

In fact, as everyone in South Vietnam knows, people are arrested for having sheet music of an antiwar song, for carrying rice at night, for any reason that strikes a police whim. Many are not tried but held indefinitely on suspicion. Just two weeks ago a union leader held without trial after a strike for higher wages was reported to have been tortured to death.

In evident embarrassment over its political prisoners, the Thieu Government has been reclassifying them as guilty of common crimes such as disturbing the peace—often again without trial, of course. And it has announced that it will turn over to the Vietcong, as "Communists," some of the best-known P isons arrested because they oppo ed the war or Mr. Thieu. A neat solution.

It is especially wrong for the United States to avert its public eye from these realities. For the police system of South Vietnam is an American creation. The Central Intelligence Agency devised the Phoenix program to hunt out V.C. suspects, which began the official torture. William Colby, the new director of the C.I.A., testified that between 1968 and May, 1971, alone 20,587 suspects were killed.

More than $14 million in American money is still available or budgeted for aid to the Saigon police and prisons. Rather than helping, the United States should be protesting police inhumanity in South Vietnam.

Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/03/08 : CIA-RDP90-01208R000100190040-9